

Family

So we lived in a tiny little two bedroom prefab and my mum and dad were really nice. I had three sisters, no brothers. Two sisters were older than me, one sister was younger. The eldest sister, Florence, took me to school when I was about seven years old and she was a grown up nurse who worked in one of the local hospitals. After school she would sometimes take me to the hospital and make me lay down on a horizontal surface to be irradiated with ultraviolet light to correct my pigeon chestedness. I was a freak. She told me I was a very handsome boy and had really good cheekbones. She told me I was very bright and clever and only needed to fix the pigeon chestedness and then I would be "normal".

I was not normal.

The next sister, Dusty, was only a few years older than me. When I was about ten she was a teenage girl going out with teddy boys. She did a part-time job serving in the Toast Rack, a local café which was located across the road from Sutton Station and served frothy coffee to beatnik art students who went to the art school on the one mile stretch of Brighton Road which connected Sutton to Belmont.

The eldest sister liked Jim Reeves and Gene Pitney.

The middle sister liked Elvis and The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.

My mum liked some of the pop music. Cliff and The Shadows for instance.

My dad liked an E.P. of Scottish Bagpipe music.

The little sister, Endora, waited to see what I liked before deciding to like the same thing.

I liked The Monkees TV show on a Saturday afternoon and The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band on "Do Not Adjust Your Set".

The little sister liked the same until she got old enough to have her own opinions and then she liked Led Zeppelin.

The youngest sister was three years younger than me and followed me around asking me what I was doing. I taught her how to play chess on a Lego base board which wasn't divided into black and white squares. We had to use our imaginations to remember where the squares were and remember which chess piece each Lego brick was meant to be. My dad made a dollshouse for the youngest sister and a soldier's fort for me. My sister didn't want to play with her dollshouse. She wanted to play with the fort and the soldiers so I made up a story in which the dolls were being held hostage in the dollshouse and the soldiers had to come from the fort to rescue them.

We both had a lot of imagination and I thought that was a good thing until she reached the age of twelve and became a pathological liar, always trying to impress people with nasty fictions.

In my entire childhood my mum and dad never hit me. Not once. Also I never saw them ever hit any of my sisters. My little sister tells a different story. She claims that she was hit. I don't

believe her. I think she was only saying that to fit in with other kids at school who had violent parents.

As we all grew up the three sisters became obsessed with television programmes and the concept of being “normal”. Nearly half of the programmes on British television were imported and most of the imported ones were American. These American programmes were cold war paranoia shows in which being “not normal” meant not conforming to American family values. If you didn’t conform to American family values it might mean that you’re a communist or queer. If you’re lucky you could escape the damning labels of “communist” or “queer” by testifying that you are in fact merely a genie, a witch, a talking horse or a favoured Martian.

I was increasingly treated as the odd one out who prefers books to television. I was not “normal”.

The youngest sister started going out with “peanuts”, which was a fashion in 1969 which rapidly changed into skinheads. Then she got tired of skinheads and went out with bikers and began listening to Led Zep. She assumed that I would like the same as her. I didn’t. I thought Led Zep were dreadful.

The youngest one was mad keen to escape from the cramped environment in which we lived. She was sharing a bedroom with our mum after dad died and the council relocated us to a redbrick house in Morden. The whole situation must have been hugely depressing to both mother and daughter. There was no money. So the youngest sister got engaged at 15, married at 16, divorced at 17. Meanwhile I was off in Glastonbury learning about ancient history, myths and legends and how the hippies lived.

I’ve never understood why my mum was still paying every week to the Co-operative Insurance collector. When was she expecting the payout? Who were the beneficiaries? I never even thought of it in those days, it wouldn’t have crossed my mind. I was too much into my science fiction books but, years and years later, the thought finally occurred to me that mum had paying the insurance man every week when dad was alive and continued paying the insurance man every week when she was a widow and continued until she died. No-one ever spoke of it except in the sense that the insurance man had to be paid every week. Was there ever a claim? Was there ever any payout? What was it for? I suppose I’ll never know now. I simply didn’t think of it in those days. I’ve never liked money sort of things. Around the same time that I was getting hypnotised and brainwashed in a pseudo-religious cult the youngest sister was suddenly turning respectable and working as a smartly dressed receptionist in a television shop.

There was always a lack of understanding between us. I was aware that I had become a fictional character to the three sisters. I was the boy. They were the girls. They made up stories about me and I passed into fiction. I was the mythological figure of the odd eccentric relative who is very clever but strange and not understood.

They didn’t realise that I was being brainwashed and was operating at seriously diminished mental capability.

The eldest sister was the matriarch of a large family. The middle sister was a manager of a petrol station. The youngest sister joined the Wrens and then left and married a man in the Fleet Air Arm. She became a housewife and mother.

I haven't spoken to any of my relatives for more than forty years. One of them tried to stalk me on the internet but I evaded them.

Apparently Stephen Fry was once told that there was an afterlife in which you are reunited with all your relatives and, according to legend, he responded by asking "But what would happen if you've been good?"

I'm sure that by living in a version of reality which doesn't have an afterlife I am definitely dodging a bullet.

I don't know who is writing me but the life I'm living is a good story and, in seventy-one years, I have mostly been happy so I hope the story continues in the same way for some time still to come.